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ABSTRACT

A study was done to examine the role of self monitoring in choice of college major. A self monitor is an individual who adopts a social orientation so that he/she can manage self presentation. Self monitors are likely to modify their academic choices to fit social situations or others' expectations. Subjects of the study were 38 male and 54 female volunteer general psychology students, including 52 freshmen, 24 sophomores, 9 juniors, and 7 seniors, 31.5 of whom had changed majors at least once. Data were collected using a four-part questionnaire that explored background, a self monitoring scale, a personal freedom versus social conformity scale and a friendship scale. Results indicated that self monitoring played a role in selection of college majors. However, data also indicated that the direct influence of close friends was not what most persuaded self monitors with regard to choice of major. Rather, broader social conformity factors such as the major's reputation, image and prestige attracted high self monitors to a major. The study also found that high self monitors were attracted to majors requiring low social intelligence suggesting that self monitors prefer enterprising but not necessarily social occupations where they, not others, can be the center of attention. Included are 23 references. (JB)

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THE ROLE OF SELF MONITORING, CONFORMITY, AND SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE IN SELECTION OF A COLLEGE MAJOR

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Various models exist (Osipow, 1990) for predicting interest in and choice of college major. Some models are person or personality centered (e.g. Holland, 1985); others are situational or socially centered (e.g. Dorn, 1984).

Personal or dispositional research has attempted to predict choice of college major and/or occupation based on personality traits or dispositions cuch as extraversion (Harrell & Alpert, 1989), intuition (Apostal & Trontvent, 1989), anxiety and locus of control (Lucas & Epperson, 1988), sex role orientation (Archer, 1985; Bentz *et al.* , 1990), self esteem (Hackett *et al.*, 1989), cognitive style (Rum, 1984; York and Linsley, 1986), self efficacy (Lent & Hackett, 1987), race (Slaney & Brown, 1983; Thomas, 1985), and fear of success (Ireland-Golman & Michael, 1983).

On the other hand, several studies have demonstrated that social factors or the influence of significant others are responsible for career and academic choices. Teachers and gender role models (Hackett *et al.*, 1989), career counselors (Dorn, 1987), family socialization experiences (Thomas, 1985), and parents (Sandberg, *et al.*, 1987) have been implicated in peoples' career and educational choices.

Despite all of this research no one social factor nor any particular dispositional characteristic (Colarelli et al ., 1987) has ultimately proven effective in predicting choice of college major or career. Perhaps a combination of these two factors such as a dispositional characteristic related to susceptibility to social persuasion directs academic or career choice. For example, some trait such as self monitoring (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986) may influence academic choice. A self monitor is an individual who adopts a social orientation so that he/she can manage self presentation (Snyder, 1974). Self monitors, then, are likely to modify their academic choices to fit social situations or others' expectations while low self monitors are likely to follow personal preferences

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when selecting college majors. With regard to career choice, Brown *et al.* (1989) have shown that high self monitors do select occupations quite different from low self monitors. And Kilduff's (1990) results suggest that high self monitors are influenced more by friends than are low self monitor~ when selecting post-graduate organizations for employment. Kilduff also found that high self monitors rank social conformity factors as important to their choice of a post-educational organization; that is, they endorse items such as "An organization that is of high status and prestige." No study has yet examined the role of self monitoring in choice of college major, the purpose of the present study.

METHOD

Subjects: Subjects were 38 male and 54 female volunteer general psychology students, including 52 freshmen, 24 sophomores, 9 juniors, and 7 seniors, 31.5 percent of whom had changed majors at least once.

Materials: Subjects received a four-part questionnaire, including 1.) background information such as class year (e.g. freshmen), sex, current major, changes in majors, etc. 2.) the revised Self Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986), 3.) a scale measuring importance of personal freedom vs. social conformity factors in academic choices (adapted from Kilduff, 1990) and 4.) a scale requesting the names of acquaintances rated for degree of friendship and whose majors were also recorded. On this friendship scale, matches between the major selected by the subject and his/her four top and four bottom (as rated for friendship) acquaintances were counted as "hits" for use in the analyses below. As a design feature, the last three parts of the questionnaire were presented in all possible orders. Also, fifteen senior psychologists rated each academic major available to subjects on degree of social intelligence required where 1 = low (e.g. biology) and 3 = high (e.g. education) as adapted from Reardon *et al.* (1979).

RESULTS

As expected, high self monitors ranked social conformity factors as more important than personal freedom factors in the selection of college majors, $t(90) = -1.88$, $p < .05$. As measured by a subfactor of the self-monitoring scale, subjects scoring high on the extraversion factor also ranked social conformity as important to choice of major, $t(90) = 3.08$, $p < .01$. No other factors (acting nor other-directedness) produced significant differences between high and low self monitors.

However, contrary to predictions, high self monitors were no more likely than low self monitors to select majors based on the choices of their friends. Also high self monitors were no more likely to have switched majors than low self monitors.

Subsidiary analyses showed that high self monitors were attracted to majors requiring the least social intelligence, $F(2,77) = 3.11$, $p < .05$. This result is supported by another analysis which indicated that high social conformists (a concept rated as important to high self monitors) also are attracted to majors requiring the least social intelligence; personal freedom seekers are more likely to declare majors high in social intelligence, $F(2,77) = 3.7$, $p < .02$.

DISCUSSION

According to the present study, self monitoring, a disposition which tends to make an individual susceptible to social influence, and especially the component of extraversion, play a role in selection of college majors just as it seems to in selection of careers (Brown *et al.*, 1989) and organizations (Kilduff, 1990). However, the present data indicate that the direct influence of close friends is not what most seems to persuade self monitors with regard to choice of major. Rather, broader social conformity factors such as the major's reputation, image, and prestige seem to be what attract high self monitors to a major. The finding that high self monitors are attracted to majors requiring low social intelligence is interesting and perhaps counterintuitive. However, Brown *et al.*'s (1989) data support this finding; they found that low, not high,

self monitors preferred social occupations. According to Brown *et al.*, self monitors seem to feel comfortable in settings that are most advantageous to the use of their social skills. Therefore, these researchers conclude that self monitors prefer enterprising but not necessarily social occupations where they, not others, can be the center of attention as suggested by Snyder and Gangestad (1986).

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